

# Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods



## Community Workshop Summary

October 17, 2008

To begin the Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods project, the city held a community-wide kick-off on September 10, 2008. More than 80 members of the public were in attendance. This meeting was followed by a series of four neighborhood workshops which concluded on September 23, 2008.

Participants completed a series of interactive exercises. These activities offered opportunities for individual comments and to work as teams to discuss important concepts and provide additional feedback. The information garnered during the workshops will inform the project's next steps, including a visual survey to be mailed to all property owners in the project area.

This document provides a general summary of the comments and feedback received during the September 2008 workshops. The first sections describe the workshop objectives and some overall themes that resulted from the public's interaction. The final sections provide a more detailed description of responses received through each of the workshop activities as well as additional comments that have been provided to date.



City of Boulder

### Consulting team:

- Winter & Company
- Code Studio
- RRC Associates
- Urban Advisors



## **Workshop Objectives**

The September 2008 workshops served to inform the community regarding the project scope and schedule as well as to obtain initial public feedback on existing conditions and potential issues. Specific objectives included:

- Assessment of city council's problem definition
- Evaluation and definition of important existing characteristics of different neighborhood contexts
- Evaluation of development permitted by current regulations in different neighborhood contexts and identification of potential issues
- Evaluation of development trends in different neighborhood contexts and identification of potential issues
- Identification of design features that could promote compatible development in single-family neighborhoods

## **Overall Themes**

Workshop participants provided a wide range of comments. However several overall themes emerged. These are summarized below.

**Agreement with the Problem Definition** Many participants expressed agreement with the problem definition provided by city council at the outset of the project. Some participant feedback included:

- "The problem definition encompasses all the elements of design that influence neighborhood character; integration of new housing into existing compatibility should be the keys to development of a successful ordinance/zoning code."
- "The problem definition seems to cover all the problems I perceive with new houses."
- "I think the council nailed it!" (referring to the problem definition)



*Workshop participants provided a wide range of comments and feedback that will inform project direction.*

**Concern with the Potential Impacts of New or Revised Regulations** Many participants expressed concern that the initial problem definition could lead to new or revised regulations that would be burdensome to property owners or builders and limit design flexibility. Feedback included:

- "There is already an overwhelming amount of restrictions, guidelines, requirements and government nonsense in this town!"
- "Will proposed changes make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for homeowners to do without help from professionals?"
- "I believe that the existing regulations are sufficient to limit house size."

**Concern with How Final Decisions Will Be Made** A number of participants felt that residents should be allowed to vote to determine whether there was actually a problem or whether specific regulations should be enacted. Some participant feedback included:

- "Making sure that ALL property owners have a say, i.e., a vote on whether the true majority of property owners want these new regulations."
- "Who thinks there is a problem? Let's take a vote!"

**Interest in Addressing Related Community Goals and Issues** A number of participants felt that the project had been defined only to address cosmetic or aesthetic issues and hoped that broader issues and concepts could be considered. The concerns that some participants wished to address included community-wide economic goals, affordable housing, environmental sustainability and neighborhood planning. Some examples of feedback included:

- “Council is missing even bigger and more important issues such as affordability and sustainability and energy that should be integrated into this problem.”
- “Our single-family neighborhoods must change to become more sustainable and compact.”

**Concern that the Problem is Isolated to a Few Projects.** A number of participants expressed the view that any potential problems were related to a small number of inappropriate projects and that far reaching restrictions would be an inappropriate reaction. Participant feedback included:

- “You may be penalizing a very large number of residents for a very small number of problem houses.
- “There are very few houses that most people would consider a problem.”

**Identification of Specific Design Issues** Participants identified a number of specific issues that were currently problematic or could become problematic with the design of new construction and additions in single-family neighborhoods. The most commonly cited issues included:

- Overly long, tall or blank walls (especially those built at or near a minimum side setback)
- Houses that are much larger than their neighbors or the surrounding context. (Participants expressed concerns with both compatibility and environmental sustainability)
- Houses that appear over-scaled or give the perception of being overly massive or bulky (regardless of actual square footage)
- Loss of open space
- Accessory structures that impact alley character or have privacy and compatibility impacts on neighboring properties
- Loss of mature trees and vegetation



*Participants identified a number of potential issues with the design of new construction and additions in single-family neighborhoods.*

**Concern That Existing Regulations May Produce Unintended Consequences or Lead to Undesirable Forms** Some participants cited specific issues or concerns with existing regulations, including the way that permitted building heights are calculated, and building forms that may be encouraged by application of the city’s solar access regulations (solar access ordinance). Feedback examples included:

- “Cause and effect of the solar code. Tall south walls are unusual design elements.”
- “Solar ordinance needs to review and preclude ‘saw-toothed’ design impacts.”

**Concern with Changes to the Social Character of Neighborhoods and the Community** Some participants felt that the social character of their neighborhoods and possibly the broader community is changing in undesirable ways. They felt that residents of many of the newly built houses were not as involved in the neighborhood nor were they as social with neighbors as previous residents had been. In some cases, participants noted design-related issues such as overly large garage doors or lack of open space that made new houses less conducive to social interaction.



## Workshop Activities

Three workshop activities were used to solicit participant feedback and discussion. The first workshop activity was completed by individual attendees while the remaining activities were completed as team exercises. Each workshop activity is briefly described below, followed by a summary of responses.

### Individual Worksheet

This activity provided participants with an opportunity to communicate their individual concerns and issues. The worksheet allowed citizens to express their opinions about the need for the project, the issues that are of greatest concern to them and potential actions that should be considered.

**Question 1.** The first question on the individual worksheet asked the respondent to comment on the initial problem definition drafted by city council. Participants were also asked if there were specific changes that they would make to the problem definition.

The responses were almost evenly distributed with just over half of the returned worksheets indicating that the respondent "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the problem definition, with the remaining indicating that they "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed."

Some comments from participants indicating that they agreed with the problem definition included:

- "I strongly agree. These are some of the impacts we see in our neighborhood as well as throughout the city."
- "I strongly agree. Real estate values are putting pressure to develop large houses that do not fit into neighborhood context."
- "I strongly agree. I have lived in Boulder for 36 years and have seen it greatly change. I understand one cannot stop progress, but I feel Boulder is losing its character in good part due to monster houses. I think we need to ask if this is what we want, instead of letting development pressure decide for us."
- "I agree. It's a good start. Let's get moving on this fast!"
- "I agree. I would strongly agree if noise and neighborhood impact were added."

Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods  
Neighborhood Area Workshop  
Individual Worksheet

At this early stage in the Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods Project, we seek to gain an understanding of your opinions about the basic direction the project should take. Please use this worksheet to express your opinions about the need for the project, the issues that are of greatest concern to you and the potential actions that should be considered.

You may leave your completed worksheet with city staff at the workshop or you may deliver it to the City of Boulder Planning and Development Services office by September 26, 2008. All responses will be tabulated.

**1. Problem Definition from City Council:**  
In April, 2008, the Boulder City Council adopted the following Problem Definition:

"To address the impact on existing established neighborhoods of new construction and additions that are incompatible in scale and bulk with the character of the neighborhood. The impacts to be considered include without limitation: consideration of site, open space, parking and bulk planes, loss of space between houses, privacy, view sheds, lot coverage, blank walls, setbacks, height and the streetscape and visual character."

**Question 1.1:**  
How do you feel about the Problem Definition presented above?

I Strongly Agree ☒ I Agree ☐ I am Neutral ☐ I Disagree ☐ I Strongly Disagree ☐

Why? Because some new construction has been added in S. Boulder just because regulations say they can (in a few cases) most are compatible however

**Question 1.2:**  
In general terms, if you would modify the Problem Definition, what would you say?

I would add "with limited impact on those who wish to build/develop within compatible guidelines" within

i.e. don't make it costly, timely to be compatible.

c. landscaping needs to be considered

**4. More Information and Suggestions:**

**Question 4.1:**  
As the project proceeds, what information do you believe will be helpful in making informed decisions about potential actions?

a. accept pictures from those in Boulder showing of likes and dislikes in immediate area.

b. cost implications of these decisions - will we price out more people out of Boulder?

**Question 4.2:**  
Do you have any other suggestions for this project?

Can there be incentives for homeowners who wish to develop within compatible guidelines? One suggestion is for architecture plans from previous developments.

**Question 4.3:**  
In which part of the city do you live?

S. Boulder

Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods  
Community Workshop #1  
September 10, 2008

**Activity #1 - Individual Worksheet**

At this early stage in the Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods Project, we seek to gain an understanding of your opinions about the basic direction the project should take. In this first activity, please express your opinions about the need for the project, the issues that are of greatest concern to you and the potential actions that should be considered. Please answer the questions below, and leave your responses in the box indicated near the entrance to the room where you leave the meeting. All responses will be tabulated. Thank you!

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**Question 1.1:**  
How do you feel about the Problem Definition presented above?

I Strongly Agree ☒ I Agree ☐ I am Neutral ☐ I Disagree ☐ I Strongly Disagree ☐

Why? I believe there is not a problem of general nature, only 2% of the major roads/new builds and these are mostly design issues, by including all these tools, "suffered" a much bigger problem.

**Question 1.2:**  
In general terms, if you would modify the Problem Definition, what would you say?

Where is the definition of "scale and bulk" and "character of the neighborhood" defined in your presentation as requested by Council?

How do you describe a neighborhood that has undergone change i.e. Newlands where they have been extensive remodels/repairs and other things in 1950s word. What is this neighborhood's character? No new on the off

and not

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to

4. More Information and Suggestions:

**Question 4.1:**  
As the project proceeds, what information do you believe will be helpful in making informed decisions about potential actions?

a. See #1c above - the only relevant information

**Question 4.2:**  
Do you have any other suggestions for this project?

Consider only suggestions from those who own property.

**Question 4.3:**  
In which part of the city do you live?

Central

\*I considered a contract to buy in Mapleton Historic District as a landowner was too restrictive after spending \$25K

Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods  
Community Workshop #1  
September 10, 2008

**Activity #1 - Individual Worksheet**

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**Question 1.1:**  
How do you feel about the Problem Definition presented above?

I Strongly Agree ☒ I Agree ☐ I am Neutral ☐ I Disagree ☐ I Strongly Disagree ☐

Why? IT PLAYS THE MONSTER HOUSE CARD. BECAUSE HOMEOWNERS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO ADD A SECOND STORY. BUT THEY CAN ADD A 3RD STORY. I DON'T THINK IT'S FAIR.

**Question 1.2:**  
In general terms, if you would modify the Problem Definition, what would you say?

None any

None

None

would be

None

None

**4. More Information and Suggestions:**

**Question 4.1:**  
As the project proceeds, what information do you believe will be helpful in making informed decisions about potential actions?

Historic information to show we can preserve history

Local businesses for historic area

Have a better mechanism than this board for hearing and

**Question 4.2:**  
Do you have any other suggestions for this project?

Use more strict enforcement mechanism - deny, not reviewing or wait it's late to act

Not done in a manner, have also have to some of same

**Question 4.3:**  
In which part of the city do you live?

North Central

An individual worksheet allowed citizens to express their opinions about the need for the project, the issues that are of greatest concern to them and potential actions that should be considered.

Some comments from participants indicating that they neither agreed or disagreed with the problem definition included:

- “I strongly disagree. I believe all important elements are already addressed in existing zoning regulations.”
- “I strongly disagree. I believe there is not a problem of general scale.”
- “I strongly disagree. Low density suburban development is directly responsible for high automobile usage. The problem is rather how to transform these districts.”
- “I disagree. ‘Character’ is too nebulous a concept. Many of the impacts to be considered are already addressed in current building codes.”
- “I disagree. I don’t believe the majority of citizens feel this is a problem significant enough to drastically change zoning regulations or FAR.”

Some comments from participants indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with city council’s problem definition included:

- “I am neutral. The issue of property rights vs. government involving themselves in these issues is a big concern for me.”
- “I am neutral. I am concerned that new regulations will handicap creativity and an individual homeowner’s ability to live in a home that works for them. I think it is only a few homes that are making people react.”

Some felt the problem definition included subjective language, was overly focused on potential issues or did not adequately address property rights and the potential impact of regulatory changes. Some comments included:

- “Statement (problem definition) is focused on issue.”
- “I would NOT include character in any way - it is not a problem and trying to define or legislate character is absurd.”
- “I think that ‘visual character’ is too subjective”
- “Why does the City Council continually attack on this issue? How can we ensure that city residents truly understand the limitations that the City Council is trying to impose?”

In other cases, participants felt that additional issues should be included in the problem definition. Some of these issues included:

- Loss of open space and mature trees
- Traffic
- The importance of historic preservation
- Energy efficiency and environmental sustainability
- Neighborhood notification for scrape-offs or large additions

**Question 2.** The second question on the individual worksheet asked respondents to indicate the three biggest issues that should be addressed as part of the project.

Many indicated specific design elements that they felt would be important to address. The design elements that were most often cited included:

- “Huge blank areas of some new houses”
- “Loss of space between houses”
- “Overall size regardless of mitigating features”
- “Apparent scale of building”
- “Height”
- “Retaining views”

Participants also listed a number of other issues they felt should be addressed including:

- “Maintaining flexibility” - “Homogeneity should not be the goal!”
- “Allowing redevelopment for higher density - more foot-friendly neighborhoods.”
- “Make sure the problem exists before proceeding” - “There is always a house or two that may be ‘out of character’ but why penalize everyone with more restrictions?”
- “To not further limit homeowners in what they can do to their homes.”
- Addressing the “economic implication of higher levels of restriction.”

**Question 3.** The third question on the individual worksheet asked for suggestions about any actions that should be considered at this early stage of the project.

Some felt that no potential actions should be considered as part of this project, often indicating that too many restrictions were already in place or that property rights could be violated. Other participants described a number of specific actions to be considered. Some of the most often cited actions were:

- Addressing what can be built on non-conforming lots
- Lowering, raising or eliminating the permitted floor area ratio
- Specifically addressing open space and landscaping
- Increasing or decreasing permitted density and considering potential mixed-use development
- Modifying the solar ordinance
- Considering the impact of garages and accessory structures
- Considering interim ordinances

**Question 4.** The fourth question on the individual worksheet asked for any additional suggestions and to indicate whether specific information would assist with informed decision making as the project moves forward.

- Additional information that was identified by participants as being potentially helpful included:
- Information about other cities that have gone through a similar process
- Thorough notification about project meetings or proposed regulations
- Testimonies from residents who have built new homes or had new homes built nearby
- An up-to-date web site
- A clear description of potential economic impacts

Additional suggestions from participants included:

- Address zone district boundaries to ensure appropriate transitions
- Provide incentives for desired development
- Slow the process down to ensure that there really is a problem



*In addition to individual comments, participants also provided comments as small groups or “teams.”*

## Map Activity

This team activity provided participants with an opportunity to identify and describe different neighborhoods, areas, or contexts throughout the city. Participants in the overall community workshop were given citywide maps, while participants in the neighborhood-area workshop were given larger scale maps illustrating their neighborhood and surrounding areas. In both cases, participants were asked to discuss, identify and describe key features of at least three areas that they felt had a distinct character.

Some indicated that Boulder's neighborhoods were mostly too diverse to classify or that they felt that existing neighborhood characteristics or character were not valid considerations as part of this project. Most participants did, however, identify some areas that they felt had unique qualities.

The following areas and their defining characteristics were most commonly identified by participants:

### Old North Boulder (between Broadway and 19th Streets)

- North-South streets and East-West lots
- Front to street
- Diversity of lot size
- Consistent front yard setbacks
- Large backyards
- Mature landscape
- Diverse building forms, mostly single story
- Attached garages, driveways from front



*A map activity provided workshop participants with an opportunity to identify and describe different neighborhoods, areas or contexts in single-family neighborhoods.*

### Broadway between Alpine and Dellwood

- Small lots, narrow widths
- East West Orientation
- Cul-de-sacs
- View lots
- Blocks have backyards backing to each other which creates open space
- Mature landscapes
- Quiet streets
- Significant scrape projects of small 1960's ranches with front garages attached
- New construction 2-3 stories many w/ detached garages or rear load
- Attached garages
- Good privacy
- Homes have consistent architectural style
- A traditional, contemporary, and eclectic mix

### Mapleton Hill

- Walkable, visually pleasing scale
- Narrow, gridded streets with alleys
- On-street parking
- Mature landscaping
- Historic homes, large lots
- Variety of house sizes, multi-unit complexes
- High number of additions
- Quiet streets

### University Hill

- Original development, historic component
- Alleys
- Consistent lot sizes
- Mixed density
- Mixture of old & new houses, remodels & pops
- Original character of older houses maintained
- Good landscaping





**Newlands**

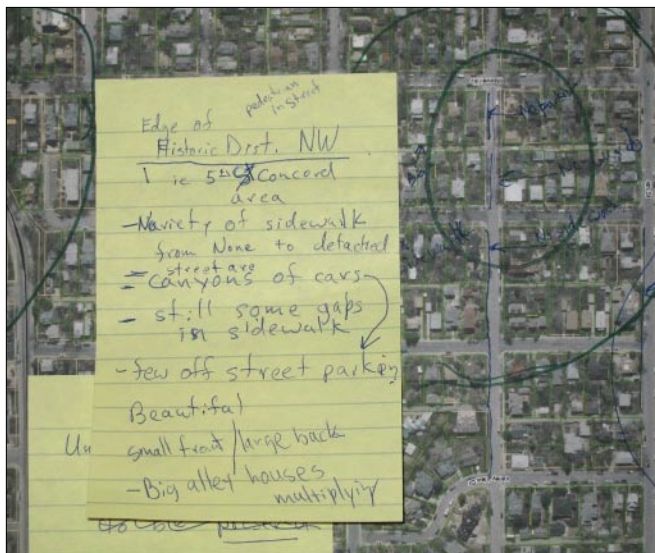
- Flat to hilly
- Clear grid with attached sidewalks and alleys
- Long narrow lots
- Detached garages
- Mixture of home ages & styles
- Mature trees
- Modest landscaping
- Pedestrian friendly

**Martin Acres**

- Attached sidewalks
- Identical setbacks
- Rare street trees
- Uniform architecture of 1 to 1-1/2 stories/ split level homes
- Parking in front or single car garage

**Table Mesa**

- Curvy, wide roads
- Setbacks vary due to sloping cliffs
- Consistent buffers between houses
- Trees are close to maturing
- Random landscaping
- Varied building height
- Many custom homes, each is unique, many are large
- In some cases, popping up would have no effect on views, solar, etc.

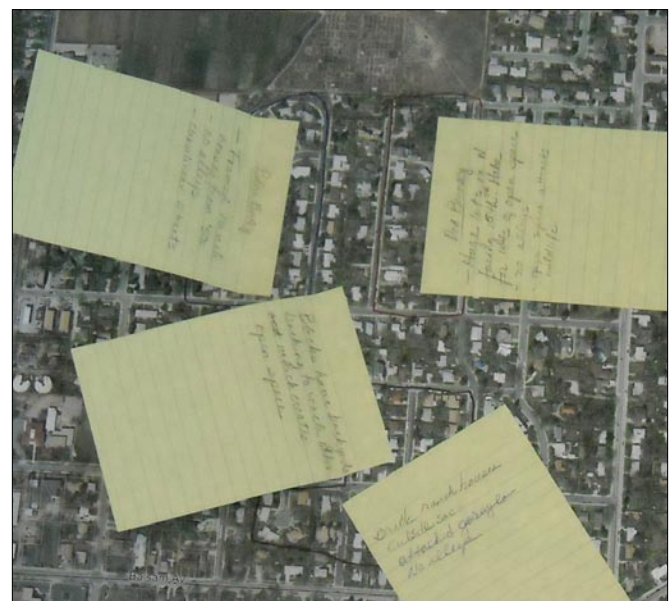


Workshop participants listed characteristics that they felt helped to identify different neighborhoods, areas or contexts in the city's single-family neighborhoods.

**Other Areas or Neighborhood Contexts**

Participants identified a number of other areas of the city as being distinct contexts or having unique characteristics which included:

- North West Broadway
- Historic District NW
- North Central Boulder: Western Edge
- North Central Boulder: Eastern Edge
- Washington School Area
- Elder Ave. and Jefferson St Loop
- Elder Ave. and 15th St.
- Alpine Ave. and North St. loop
- Folsom St. to 19th St. (Edgewood Dr.)
- Pine St. East of Folsom
- Area east of Broadway, North of Walnut
- West Arapahoe
- Goss-Grove
- North Table Mesa
- Table Mesa and US Hwy. 36
- West of Broadway and Table Mesa
- Marine Area (Canyon to College, West of Broadway)
- South Broadway
- East Broadway
- North of Baseline Rd.
- Baseline Rd. and Foothills Pkwy.
- Shanahan Ridge
- West of Lehigh St.
- Highlands Park
- Frasier Meadows





## Poster Activity

This team activity provided workshop attendees with an opportunity to review and discuss current development trends and development that would be permitted by existing regulations to identify any potential issues for single-family neighborhoods. Participants were also given an opportunity to review and discuss specific design elements that could promote compatibility in new development.

**Part 1.** The first part of the poster activity showed a three dimensional illustration of one of five different sample blocks in single-family neighborhoods. Each sample block illustrated a set of existing conditions within the neighborhood in which the workshop was held. Three different views of the sample-block illustration were shown on each poster:

- Typical existing conditions
- Typical existing conditions with new development permitted by existing regulations
- Typical existing conditions with new development corresponding to current development trends

The teams were asked to identify three key features of the illustrated context, as well as three potential issues with both the permitted development and the development trends that were illustrated.

Although different key features were identified for each of the five different sample blocks, some features were often cited as being important in several or all of the illustrations. These features included:

- Existing ratios of house size to lot size
- Orientation of houses towards the street
- Existing open space patterns
- Existing setback patterns (consistent front yard setbacks, varied side yard setbacks, etc.)
- Existing parking locations and garage characteristics (attached garages, detached garages, parking access from an alley when present, etc.)

**Compatible Development in Single-Family Neighborhoods**  
Community Workshop #1 - September 10, 2008

**Part 1: Identifying Features and Issues Related to Context**

**A. Existing Conditions**  
Existing features that contribute to the character of Boulder's residential design context and neighborhoods may include building height, open space patterns, and the general shape of buildings as viewed from the street or neighboring properties. Choose the illustration of existing conditions. Then, identify three (3) key features of the context that should be considered for new development.

**B. Permitted Buildings**  
Current regulations such as setbacks, height limits and solar access requirements define a three dimensional "building envelope" that limits where development may occur. This envelope is shown as a transparent bubble on two selected lots in the illustrations below. Development that would be permitted by current regulations is shown within the transparent building envelope. Choose the illustrations of permitted development below and identify three (3) potential issues.

**Part 2: Identifying Compatible Elements**

What are some of the design elements that can help achieve compatibility with the established context? As a team, discuss the set of photographs in the provided handout and identify design features that would be compatible with the context illustrated above. Then, select six (6) images that have some positive features, which could contribute to compatibility and paste them below with captions to explain their selection. Note that there may be some aspects of an image that may not be considered to be appropriate - focus on those elements that could be compatible.

**Activity #3 - Team Worksheet**  
Identifying Key Features, Issues and Compatible Design Elements

Although they do often influence the compatibility of development, trees and landscaping are not included in the illustrations at this early stage of the project. As the project continues, a number of additional design elements will be studied and illustrated in workshop materials.

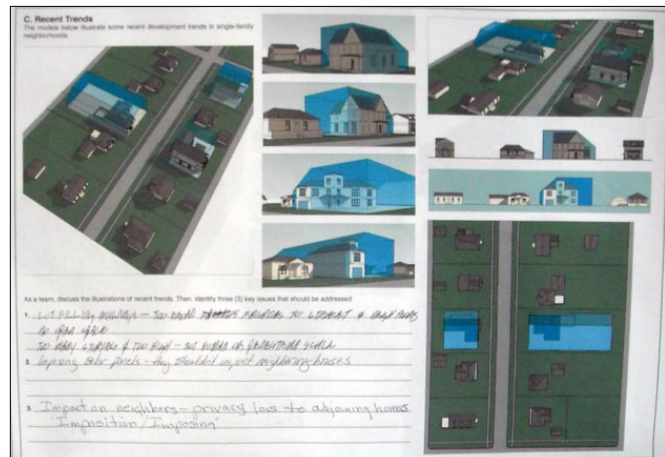
The poster activity provided participants with an opportunity to discuss potential issues with current trends and permitted development as well as to identify specific design features that could promote compatibility in new development.

Some of the commonly identified issues with permitted development (as illustrated) were:

- Too much mass and bulk
- Too much permitted square footage (FAR too low)
- Walls that are too tall (especially on the south side per the existing solar ordinance)
- Long, unbroken walls and uninteresting building elevations
- Lack of variety in wall planes/height
- Loss of open space (especially in back yard areas)
- Forms that loom over the street or neighbors
- Loss of privacy
- Potential for three story buildings
- Loss of views
- Shape of the building permitted/encouraged by the solar ordinance

Some of the most commonly identified issues with the illustrated development trends were:

- Overall mass, size and height
- Buildings that are very large and do not have compensating design elements
- Shape of homes caused by solar envelope
- Major axis of homes in opposite direction as existing homes
- Loss of open space (especially in backyard areas)
- Long, unbroken walls and uninteresting building facades
- Long, tall homes built at or near setbacks
- 'Looming' quality of buildings
- Unsustainable development patterns



Part 1 of the poster activity included three-dimensional models illustrating development trends occurring in the city's single-family neighborhoods. Participants discussed and commented on potential issues with the development trends.



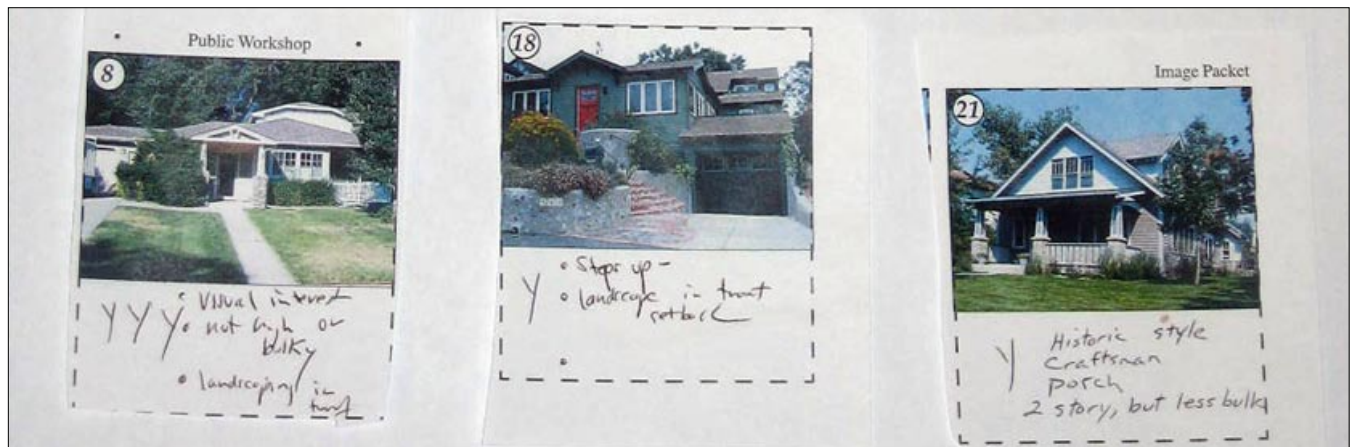
**Part 2.** For the final part of the poster activity, each team was given a set of photographs of new homes and additions from a number of communities around the country. Working as a team, they were asked to select six photographs that illustrated at least one design feature that would help it fit into the sample block illustrated in Part 1. They were then asked to caption the photographs and paste them to their poster.

While a wide variety of sample photographs were selected, the primary reasons cited for their selections were similar. The explanations most commonly given for the selected photographs included:

- Variety in building and/or roof massing
- Stepped-back upper floors
- Articulated facades, particularly front facades
- No front garage, or a non-prominent garage
- Front porches
- Establishes a relationship with the street
- Room in side yards for vegetation
- Mature trees and landscaping



*At the conclusion of the poster activity, some participants summarized their team's discussion and comments in front of the larger group.*



*In Part 2 of the poster activity, participants worked as teams to discuss photographs of new construction and additions and select several that illustrated design features that could help make them more compatible in a specific single-family neighborhood context.*



*Participants used the photographs provided for Part 2 of the poster activity to indicate a variety of design features that they felt could help promote compatibility in new development. Commonly selected features included modest massing, sloped roof forms, vegetation, front porches and relationship to the street.*



## **Other Feedback**

A number of community members have sent e-mails or letters to the city with additional feedback on the project. This additional feedback is briefly summarized below:

- “Long term economic, demographic and affordability effects should be considered earlier on in the process as they have a large impact on how Boulder will shape up in the coming years.”
- “Sustainability and economic issues have direct implications for building envelopes and should be included in the study.”
- “Modifications, such as home offices, accessory units, etc. should be included.”
- “Intensity or density changes, such as alley houses, end block row houses and higher density along transit routes, should be considered.”
- “The size and location of accessory structures and garages should be considered, especially where they abut neighboring properties or dominate rear yards.”
- “Trends towards removal of all existing mature trees should be mitigated.”

## **For More Information**

Please visit the project Web site listed below and click on “Hot Topics” for more information.

[www.boulderplandevlop.net](http://www.boulderplandevlop.net)

Workshop information and feedback opportunities will be available online throughout the project. To subscribe to the project e-mail list, go to the project Web site and click on “Subscribe to e-mail list” for more information.

### **For more information contact:**

Planning & Development Services  
City of Boulder  
1739 Broadway, 3rd Floor  
Boulder, Colorado 80302

Julie Johnston, Senior Planner  
(303) 441-1886  
[johnstonj@bouldercolorado.gov](mailto:johnstonj@bouldercolorado.gov)